

Data Stewardship Executive Policy Committee

DS001a - Administrative Data Acquisition, Access, and Use Policy

PURPOSE

To establish a mandatory business process for conducting projects that use administrative data at the U.S. Census Bureau and to safeguard confidential administrative data we obtain from other agencies and entities.

BACKGROUND

The infrastructure and volume of administrative data used at the U.S. Census Bureau supports a wide variety of programs for which administrative data from outside sources are essential. Reuse of government data is mandated by Title 13, United States Code (U.S.C.), and provides for the continued production of valuable statistics without further burdening the public with direct collections. The Census Bureau obtains administrative data, about individuals and businesses, from government agencies, as well as commercial sources. The use of these data are subject to the protections provided by Title 13 U.S.C. and may also entail additional restrictions on use levied by the providing entity. This policy (DS001a) establishes the Census Bureau's commitment to data stewardship, protecting the confidentiality, and ensuring the appropriate use of the administrative data we acquire.

This policy summarizes a mandatory business process for Census Bureau staff and special sworn status (SSS) individuals to follow when conducting projects that use administrative data containing identifiable information about individuals and businesses (e.g., requesting access to or acquiring administrative data, as well as complying with reporting and tracking requirements). This policy is meant to be used in conjunction with the *Administrative Data Projects Handbook* (DS001b), a more detailed document that further articulates the mandatory requirements summarized here.

This policy defines administrative data and administrative data projects, defines which administrative data sets are in scope for this policy, and provides a summary of the mandatory requirements for administrative data access and use.

DEFINITION OF ADMINISTRATIVE DATA & PROJECTS

Administrative Data. Administrative data refer to microdata records contained in files collected and maintained by administrative or program agencies and commercial entities. Government and commercial entities maintain these files for the purpose of administering programs and providing services. Administrative data are distinct from systems of information collected exclusively for statistical purposes, such as data from censuses and surveys that are produced under the authority of Title 13, U.S.C. The Census Bureau primarily draws upon administrative data developed by federal, state, local agencies, and tribal governments, but also obtains data

from commercial entities. Data we acquire from commercial entities are often dubbed “third party” data. Administrative data may also be culled from public sources. Prominent sources of administrative data used by the Census Bureau are the Internal Revenue Service (IRS), Social Security Administration (SSA), Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, Housing and Urban Development (HUD), United States Postal Service (USPS), and state data that feeds into the Census Bureau’s Longitudinal Employer Household Dynamics (LEHD) program. Use of this data is governed by interagency agreements between the Census Bureau and data providing agencies, as well as regulatory requirements. For example, the appropriate use of Federal Tax Information (FTI) is outlined in both federal law and regulations such as the IRS Publication 1075, which codifies the methods by which FTI is protected, and the IRS Criteria Agreement that articulates administrative reporting requirements.

Administrative Data Projects. The Census Bureau tracks, manages, and reports on its administrative data activities both internally and externally at a “project” level. An administrative data project is a project that makes use of administrative data. An example of such a project is the “Demonstration of Administrative Records Improving Surveys.”

In general, a project is a set of activities that has a distinct mission with clear starting and ending points. Projects have a life cycle that proceeds from conception to planning, execution, and termination. However, some projects are extended or repeat indefinitely (e.g., surveys). There is generally a single point of contact for each project. A project is often part of a broader program and is a building block in the design and execution of program goals. Dependent relationships may exist between projects.

SCOPE

Several documents govern the process by which administrative data projects are carried out. Projects that use administrative data must adhere to this policy and the processes outlined in the *Administrative Data Projects Handbook*. The *Administrative Data Projects Handbook* applies to all administrative data projects and datasets maintained by the Census Bureau. Furthermore, the *Data Access and Transfer Policy* mandates that all datasets used for projects must be registered and tracked by the Census Bureau’s Electronic Project Tracking System (i.e., the Data Management System, or DMS). Tracking data sets in the DMS ensures proper use and reporting, and it enhances the coordination of corporate information sharing across the Census Bureau.

When the Census Bureau collects information from individuals or businesses, that information is usually subject to Title 13 confidentiality restrictions. All Census Bureau employees and individuals with SSS swear an oath to uphold the confidentiality of information that they access. However, administrative data we receive from external sources often comes with additional restrictions regarding access and use that go beyond the provisions of Title 13. In addition to Title 13 protections, these files are often protected by the data supplier’s own statutes or regulations, or by language in an agreement with the data supplier. The Census Bureau must meet all legal obligations imposed by the external providers of administrative data.

A significant example of data protected by both Title 13 and a data supplier’s statute is all FTI, whether received from the IRS directly or from the SSA. Additional examples include the InfoUSA File or vital records from the National Center for Health Statistics.

Administrative data projects that are considered in-scope for this policy are those that:

- Plan to use administrative data files that are protected by Title 13, Sections 8 and 9 and/or carry constraints imposed by the data-provider; AND

- Plan to use administrative data files containing information about individuals or businesses; AND
- Involve internal, external reimbursable, or joint proposals; AND
- Involve research or production.

Furthermore, administrative data projects that are considered in-scope for this policy can include:

- New or novel activities OR previously-established, routine activities that involve significant modification to existing data (e.g., more detailed categories); OR
- Routine, vetted, ongoing production activities in support of regular, Census Bureau programs that use administrative data that carry provider-related constraints (e.g., Business Register).

POLICY

The mandatory requirements that Census Bureau staff and SSS individuals must follow when acquiring, accessing, or using administrative data that are in-scope for this policy are described below. The descriptions of these requirements are organized around the lifecycle of an administrative data project, and are summarized at a high level.

The summary of these requirements are intended to be used in conjunction with the *Administrative Data Projects Handbook*, which contains a greater level of detail regarding the procedures that staff and SSS individuals are required to follow.

Failure to follow these requirements will result in the revocation of access to administrative data for Census Bureau staff and SSS individuals.

Step 1. Initial Project/Proposal Development

At this step of the project, staff (and SSS individuals, as appropriate) are required to:

- Develop an administrative project proposal that supports the Census Bureau's mission.
- Identify the administrative dataset(s) needed for the research by browsing the datasets registered in the Census Bureau's Electronic Project Tracking System (now in the Data Management System catalog, also known as the DMS¹). Project proposals must identify and document the administrative datasets they wish to request and access.
- Agree to use only demographic data that has received one-time pad or FIPS encrypted identifiers such as the Protected Identification Key (PIK). DSEP must approve any project requesting direct access to PII (i.e., names of individuals and SSNs).
- Agree to use only business data that has been identified numerically (e.g., EIN, Census File Number, Census Alpha, LBDnum, SEIN, Census geography, etc.).
- Obtain permission to use the data set(s) from the Information Owner(s). (The Census Bureau's Electronic Project Tracking System will contact the IOs automatically once data sets are requested for a particular project.)

¹ The DMS is a software system that catalogs, documents, tracks, and controls access to all datasets maintained by the Census Bureau. Registration of datasets in the DMS became mandatory in January 2014.

- Work with the Administrative Records Coordinator in the Policy Coordination Office (PCO/DIR) to carry out a formal agreement process for the acquisition of new administrative data.
- Enter the finalized project proposal to the Census Bureau's Electronic Project Tracking System to begin the review and approval process.
 - Internal projects originate from researchers at the Census Bureau and the Project Contact for the project is responsible for entering the proposal and related materials to the Census Bureau's Electronic Project Tracking System.
 - Researchers, external to the Census Bureau, wishing to access confidential data through the Federal Statistical Research Data Centers (FSRDCs) must contact an FSRDC Administrator in order to obtain information about the project development and review protocols. The Administrator assists the researcher in developing an abstract, proposal, and Predominant Purpose Statement (PPS), and in the process enters project information and uploads documents to the Center for Economic Studies' (CES) Management System (CMS).

Step 2. Project Review and Approval

At this step of the project, staff (and SSS individuals, as appropriate) are required to:

- Upload all project related documents into the Census Bureau's Electronic Project Tracking System. If the project plans to link datasets and is in-scope for the *Record Linkage Policy* (DS014), the documentation must include a *Data Linkage Checklist* (DS014).
- Undergo a formal review and approval process for each administrative data project proposal. The review ensures projects have scientific merit; a purpose that furthers the Census Bureau's mission; sufficient oversight from Data Stewardship Executive Policy (DSEP) Committee; ample confidentiality and privacy controls; and are in compliance with Title 13, U.S.C. and existing data agreements. The review and approval process is tracked by the Census Bureau's Electronic Project Tracking System.
- Be responsive at each stage of the review process (e.g., providing additional information as needed, revising and resubmitting updated versions of the project proposal to the Census Bureau's Electronic Project Tracking System, etc.).
- Wait for the Project Review Coordinator to obtain appropriate approvals from all Information Owners and other reviewers before using administrative data. For example, if a project uses FTI, the project must have approval from the Census Bureau's Information Owner as well as the IRS before the FTI can be accessed and used.
- Wait until approval from all stakeholders is granted before beginning work, unless a particular phase of the project has been approved and partial work can begin that involves only the data for which approval has been granted (called a "Phased Approval").
- Present the proposal to the DSEP Committee, prior to project approval, if required.

Step 3. Data Access and Agreement Administration

At this step of the project, staff (and SSS individuals, as appropriate) are required to:

- Access administrative data with the appropriate one-time pad or FIPS encrypted (demographic) or numeric (business) identifiers for approved project uses through designated, secure Census Bureau channels (e.g., through a Federal Statistical Research Data Center, Virtual Desktop Interface, or Census Bureau-controlled computers).
- Comply with the restrictions set forth by the providing agency while using the data.
- Abide by all data security and confidentiality requirements.
- Maintain a current list of Census Bureau staff and/or SSS individuals assigned to a particular administrative data project. This means updating the Census Bureau's Electronic Project Tracking System immediately, in real time, with an accurate accounting of staff members still assigned to the project (i.e., removing people who are no longer working on the project and adding new people who plan to work on the project).
- Complete the mandatory, annual "Data Stewardship and IT Security Awareness" and "Title 26 Awareness" training by the June 30th deadline designated by the Policy Coordination Office. (All Census Bureau staff and SSS individuals must take an oath to protect the data and undergo a background check. Census Bureau staff submit to these requirements as a condition of employment. SSS individuals must complete these steps before they are allowed to work on projects.)
- Conduct an annual review of each project and document this review in the Census Bureau's Electronic Project Tracking System.
- Maintain accurate server name and information for each project in the Census Bureau's Electronic Project Tracking System.
- Abide by disclosure avoidance procedures and submit any statistical products resulting from the research, prior to publication/release or sharing beyond those working on the project, to the Census Bureau's Disclosure Review Board (DRB), or another appropriate DRB (e.g., SSA's DRB). A DRB review is required for statistical products based in whole or in part on administrative data. Statistical products using administrative data might also be subject to additional disclosure review, as required by the providing agency.
- Upload the memo documenting the request for disclosure avoidance review to the Census Bureau's Electronic Project Tracking System as part of the project's documentation. The Center for Disclosure Avoidance Research and the DRB will document approval/denial in the Census Bureau's Electronic Project Tracking System.
- Post non-confidential results (or a non-confidential summary of the results) from the research in the Census Bureau's Electronic Project Tracking System.
- Implement project close-out procedures by setting the project to "Completed" or "Terminated" in the Census Bureau's Electronic Project Tracking System.
- At the Project Contact's request, internal and external projects in "Completed" status may be reopened to allow the researchers to respond to external peer-review of the research. The Census Bureau recognizes that Title 13 benefits are not fully realized until the research has been reviewed and published. The integrity of research done under Census Bureau auspices depends upon the confidence of the scientific community in our adherence to the principle of peer review. Every effort should be made to allow for

timely response to peer review, consistent with the requirements of Title 13 and agreements with external data providers.

EFFECTIVE DATE

Upon signature.

LEGAL AUTHORITIES

- Title 13, U.S.C., Section 6. Provides the Census Bureau authority to acquire and use data in lieu of conducting direct inquiries of the general public.
- Title 13, U.S.C., Sections 8 and 9. Prohibits the publication or release of any data that would permit identification of any particular establishment, individual, or household.
- Title 13, U.S.C. Section 8(b). Authorizes the Census Bureau to collect data on behalf of other agencies on a reimbursable basis.
- Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995. Encourages agencies to reduce the public's information collection burden by reusing administrative data already available within the government.
- The Privacy Act of 1974. Requires all agencies to safeguard identifiable personal information and not disclose this identifiable data to third parties without the individual's consent—exceptions to the consent requirement are intended to accommodate legitimate needs for identifiable information like conducting research for statistical purposes; covers information about individuals, but not businesses or other entities. Additionally, it permits agencies—who are otherwise prohibited from disclosing records under the Privacy Act—to disclose records “to the Bureau of the Census for the purposes of planning or carrying out a census or survey or related activity pursuant to the provisions of Title 13.”
- The E-Government Act of 2002. OMB Circular No. A-11, Form 300 and Section 208: require Privacy Impact Assessments, or PIAs, for any information technology system or electronic data collection that contains PII. The purpose of the PIA is to ensure that no collection, storage, access, use, or dissemination of identifiable personal information occurs without proper proof of need and purpose, and to ensure that appropriate security measures and controls on data use are in place.
- Statistical Efficiency Act of 1999. Congress encouraged eight bureaus/offices—including the Census Bureau—to share data for statistical purposes in an effort to save money on direct collections.

IMPLEMENTATION

The Data Integration Planning Committee (DIPC) is responsible for implementing this policy by disseminating it to the divisions represented on the committee.

RELATED DOCUMENTS

Federal Statistical System & Ethical Guidance

- [FCSM Working Paper 22 \(Version 2, 2005\)](#). Report on Statistical Disclosure Limitation Methodology.
- The Federal Committee on Statistical Methodology, *Working Paper #5: Report on Exact and Statistical Matching Techniques*, 1980
- The National Academy of Sciences, *Private Lives and Public Policies*, 1993
- The Federal Committee on Statistical Methodology, *Record Linkage Techniques – 1985: Proceeding of the Workshop on Exact Matching Methodologies*, 1985
- The National Research Council, *Principles and Practices for a Federal Statistical Agency*, 2001
- The General Accounting Office, *Record Linkage and Privacy: Issues in Creating New Federal Research and Statistical Information*, 2001
- The National Research Council, *Protecting Participants and Facilitating Social and Behavioral Sciences Research*, 2003
- The Office of Management and Budget, *Memorandum 11-02: Sharing Data While Protecting Privacy*, 2010
- The National Research Council, *Principles and Practices for a Federal Statistical Agency, Fifth Edition*, 2013
- The Office of Management and Budget, *Memorandum 14-06: Guidance for Providing and Using Administrative Data for Statistical Purposes*, 2014

Relevant Census Bureau Policies and Procedures

- The Census Bureau's *Strategic Plan* (FY13-17). Provides direction for record linkage in Objective 1.2. *Tactic 1.2.4*. states, "Integrate data from existing sources, including administrative records, to produce new information products that provide deeper insights into our people and economy by combining data sets that had not previously been linked."
- *Record Linkage Policy* (DS014). Establishes criteria for conducting projects that use record linkage at the U.S. Census Bureau.
- *Safeguarding and Managing Information* (DS007). This policy outlines the process for controlling access to identifiable economic and demographic data throughout the survey lifecycle at the Census Bureau.
- *Unauthorized Browsing* (DS018). This policy prohibits staff, without a business-need-to-know, from accessing identifiable economic and demographic data.
- *Negotiating Collaborative Arrangements with Agencies for the Acquisition of Administrative Record Data to Support Title 13 Projects* (DS012). This policy provides guidance to staff on the proper justifications for the use and acquisition of administrative records.

- *Administrative Data Projects Handbook* (DS001b). The handbook outlines the architecture of the process by which research can be undertaken with Census Bureau and survey data linked to other types of data. It contains descriptions of:
 - The review process by which staff may submit and gain approval for administrative records project proposals. This process determines scientific merit; executes stringent proposal reviews at various levels (e.g., division chief, Information Owner, disclosure, and policy); and identifies projects involving sensitive topics, populations and data sets or proposed merges. The Census Bureau's Executive staff provide the final approval for novel or sensitive proposals.
 - The architecture of the Census Bureau's data stewardship protocol that protects the data. The Census Bureau tightly controls this protocol (i.e., who can see the data, where it can be accessed); the statistical results are subject to disclosure reviews prior to presentation and/or publication; and breach contingency plans are described.
 - The Census Bureau's Project Tracking System for survey and administrative data sets controls access to data to authorized users.
- *Privacy Principles* (PP). The Privacy Principles set the ethical standards for the U.S. Census Bureau's data collection, handling, and dissemination. They serve as the underpinnings for all Data Stewardship policies and as the basis for current and future practices.
- *Privacy Impact Assessment* (DS019) process. Outlines the requirements for conducting, updating, and releasing a Privacy Impact Assessment. A Census Bureau program, project or system must be covered by an up-to-date privacy impact assessment if it involves the use of identifiable data from or about members of the public and in other cases as required by law or regulation.
- Policy Coordination Office's *Data Access and Transfer Policy*. This policy provides guidelines for registration of datasets, authorization for accessing data, access to data, and transferring of data files within the Census Bureau, using the Data Management System (DMS). The policy requires administrative datasets to be registered in the Data Management System.
- *Research Proposal Review Process Policy* (DS24). This policy establishes the minimum requirements and criteria for the review of research project proposals at the Census Bureau. These reviews will help foster collaboration and creativity at the Census Bureau, foster awareness of new Census Bureau research, and reduce the possibility of duplicative research.
- [*Federal Statistical Research Data Centers \(FSRDCs\)*](#). FSRDCs are Census Bureau facilities, housed in partner institutions, that meet all physical and information security requirements for access to restricted-use data of the Census Bureau and other agencies whose data are used in projects. The secure FSRDC environment supports qualified researchers while protecting respondent confidentiality with state-of-the-art tools and processes.

POLICY OWNER

Administrative Records Coordinator, Policy Coordination Office (PCO/DIR).

SIGNATURE

William D. Bostie Jr For

Nancy Potok

10/25/16

Date

Chair, Data Stewardship Executive Policy Committee

Summary Information	
Policy Title:	Administrative Data Acquisition, Access, and Use Policy
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Office Responsible for Implementation:	PCO/DIR
Office Responsible for Dissemination:	PCO - DIPC
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